

The First Steps of Legato for the Young Trombonist

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Clean legato on the trombone requires **constant air**, **light tongue**, and a **fast slide**. Address each component individually.

The Process

Let's take an excerpt from a melody:



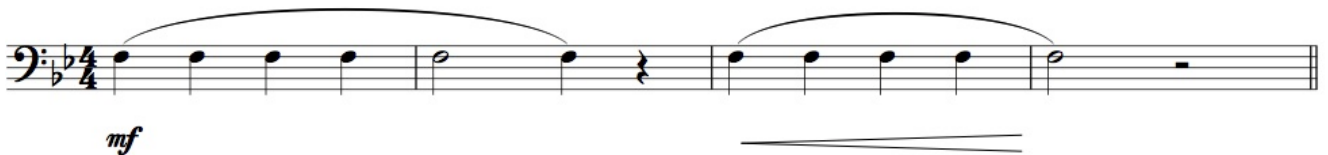
Glissando the same melody, focusing solely on **constant air**:



Key points:

- Listen for gaps, indicating that the air is stopping. Constant air should produce constant sound!
- First notes should still get tongued, but should start with immediate air.
- Try this exercise with a fast slide for an extra challenge later. Try to make it sound passible without any tongue.

Now retain the constant air and practice the **light tongue** by *playing the rhythm of the music on one pitch*. The 5th scale degree is often a good choice.

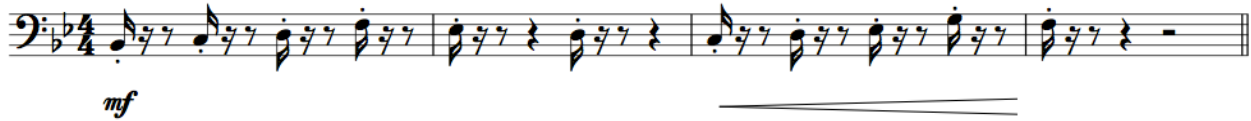


Key points:

- A light "loo" or "loh" syllable should produce the desired result, but proper tongue placement is important. Tip of the tongue touches the back of the top teeth at the gum line.
- There should still be no breaks in the sound. If there are, glissando again!

- c) This type of tonguing is called “feather-tonguing,” which highlights just how light this should be.

To practice the **fast slide**, *play only the fronts of the notes*, like so:



Key points:

- The goal of this exercise is to move the slide in rhythm, at the latest possible moment and as quick as possible.
- “Play rhythm with the slide.”
- The teacher must observe the slide motion and provide proper feedback, though the keen student will recognize a slow slide.
- Listen for the clarity of each note; bruises and cracks indicate that something is not working properly.

Then, **put it all together!** Students should practice these parts separately to develop new, effective habits. Combining them creates a smoother, gentler legato.

Laying the Groundwork

- **Air Production**
 - Air should be steady and constant
 - Sigh through the instrument to reinforce the relaxed exhale: no excess tension!
 - Practice any music glissando, focusing on constant sound that does not stop
- **Changing Vocal Syllables**
 - Practice speaking syllables, then playing (Repeat after me...)
 - Low notes = “Oh”
 - Mid Range = “Ah”
 - High Range = “Ee”
 - Registers will change as the student develops.
 - A 4th partial B \flat may need “Ee” for the first or second year of playing, but will become “Ah” as the range increases.
 - Practice this ability with lip slurs
 - “Tee-Ah-Oh” becomes b \flat – f – B \flat
 - Generally, most students will have more success descending than ascending.
 - This technique is important for a student’s ability to move constant air when changing partials, and becomes even more crucial when they begin to natural slur.
- **Slide Technique**
 - Using the “Spock” technique helps to incorporate wrist motion to maximize efficiency:

- Two fingers on top of bottom slide tube
- Two fingers beneath bottom slide tube
- Thumb behind crossbar
- All using the pads of the fingers to hold the slide

Other Techniques to Try:

- Sing – Buzz – Play
 - The key is to buzz glissando, with no tongue after the first note
 - Try using a BERP or Brass Buzzer so the students can also use the slide
- Wind Patterning
 - Blow air against your hand, and tongue the rhythm
 - Feel the student’s air, and have them feel yours. Do they feel the difference?
- Paper on Wall
 - Blow air to keep a paper against the wall.
 - Play a piece of music, and then tongue the rhythm while keeping the paper on the wall. Return to the music and evaluate any change.

Suggested Literature:

- Introductory Melodious Etudes for Trombone Ferdinand Sieber, arr. Alan Raph
- 55 Phrasing Studies by Jaroslav Cimerá
- The Intermediate Trombonist: Building Blocks for Tone and Technique by Brad Edwards

Complete 8 Bar Melodies:

Number 1:

Number 5:

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